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A study of abstract landscape

Frederick Lipp

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"A Study of Abstract Landscape"

by

Frederick C. Lipp, Candidate
for the Master of Fine Arts in the
College of Fine and Applied Arts
of the Rochester Institute of Technology

Date: 5/29/67

Advisor: Professor Fred Meyer

To my wife, for her willingness.

10/67 R.I.T. Thesis

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate some possibilities of the landscape motif through simplification.

Landscape: an expanse of natural scenery seen by the eye in one view.¹

Simplify: to make more simple; render less complex; make easy or easier.²

¹Webster's New World Dictionary, College Edition, New York, World Pub. Co., 1954, p. 820.

²Ibid, p. 1360.

"Every creative work of art requires elimination and simplification. Simplification results from a realization of what is essential."³

³Hans Hoffman, William C. Seitz, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1963, p. 53.

Landscape, as I interpret it, is nature. Nature in the universe, which is infinite. Landscape then is everything and anything within the universe that may or may not be perceived or conceived.

I have chosen to deal with both the perceptual and the conceptual aspects.

"For the artist communication with nature remains the most essential condition. The artist is human; himself nature; part of nature within natural space."⁴

"The spiritual life to which art belongs, and of which it is one of the mightiest agents, is a complex but definite movement above and beyond, which can be translated into simplicity. This movement is that of cognition. Although it may take different forms, it holds basically to the same internal meaning and purpose."⁵

⁴Pedagogical Sketchbook, Paul Klee, New York, Praeger, 1953, p. 7.

⁵Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Wassily Kandinsky, New York, Wittenborn, 1963, p. 26.

"I have told my young students: "You want to paint? First of all you must cut off your tongue because your decision takes away from you the right to express yourself with anything but your brush."⁶

Any work of art requires personal interpretation and reaction. It would be redundant for me to write down any conceptual ideas that I have attempted. They await the viewer.

"I myself am fully convinced that the best explanation an artist can give of his aims and ability is afforded by his work."⁷

⁶Radio Interviews, Henri Matisse, 1942, as quoted in Matisse His Art and His Public, Alfred H. Barr Jr., New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1951, p. 562.

⁷Notes of a Painter, Henri Matisse, 1908, Ibid, p. 119.

The ancient Chinese painter had a word, tao, that represented for them the way. The tao consisted of six canons and within these limitations many masterpieces were produced.

Today, many claim our cannons are empty, there are no rules, anything goes. I view this as the ancient classicist-romanticist antagonism re-visited.

"Pro-classical critics are wont to say of some romanticist they half admire, "If only he had had discipline!" It would be easy to retort of a classicist, "If only he had been let alone by rule-ridden mediocrities!" Both statements are anti-historical. The choice does not exist, for artists find themselves inspired or crushed by institutions which they are not alone in making. That is why it is important to know what is achieved when the general will produces a classical order, and at what cost. To suppose that one can have classicism without authoritarianism is like supposing that one can have braking power without friction. Conversely, romanticism is not simply love of ease or impatient rebellion. It is a different way of fulfilling human wants after the breakdown of an attempt at eternal order."⁸

I cannot make my home in either camp.

⁸Classic, Romantic and Modern, Jacques Barzun, New York, Doubleday-Anchor, 1961, p. 49.

"Some will object perhaps that a painter should have some other outlook upon painting and that I have uttered only platitudes. To this I shall answer that there are no new truths. The role of the artist, like that of the scholar, consists in penetrating truths as well known to him as to others but which will take on for him a new aspect and so enable him to master them in their deepest significance. Thus if the aviators were to explain to us the researches which led to their leaving earth and rising in the air they would be merely confirming very elementary principles of physics neglected by less successful inventors."⁹

⁹Notes of a Painter, Henri Matisse, op. cit., pp. 122, 23.

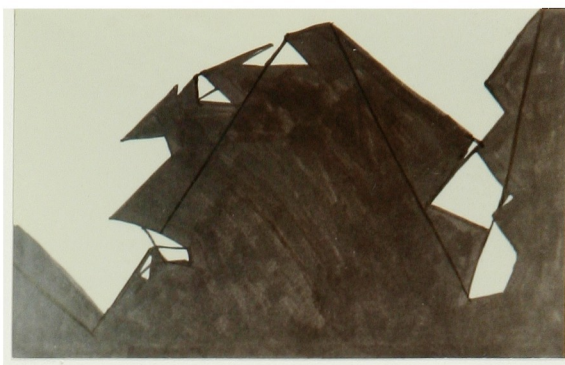
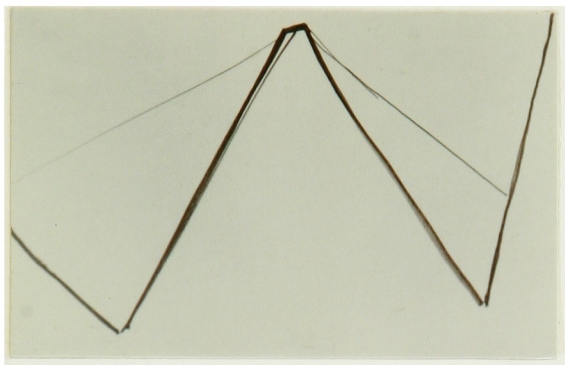
A photography instructor once said to me that the only time to snap the shutter is when something says, come take my picture. I, intuitively, have used this premise in my painting.

My painting starts with a sketch. The sketch may receive its impetus from the outside or from within me. I may be rhythmical, lyrical, analytical; conscious or unconscious; a deep probe, or merely a doodle.

I sketch to stimulate the juices. I paint when I feel "the urgency to attempt."

"For art is innate in the artist, like an instinct that seizes and makes a tool out of the human being. The thing that in the final analysis wills something in him is not he, the personal man, but the aim of art. As a person he may have caprices and a will and his own aims, but as an artist he is in a higher sense "man", he is the collective man, the carrier and the shaper of the unconsciously active soul of mankind."¹⁰

¹⁰Psychology and Poetry, C.A. Jung, as quoted in Henry Moore, Herbert Read, New York, Praeger, 1966, p. 208.

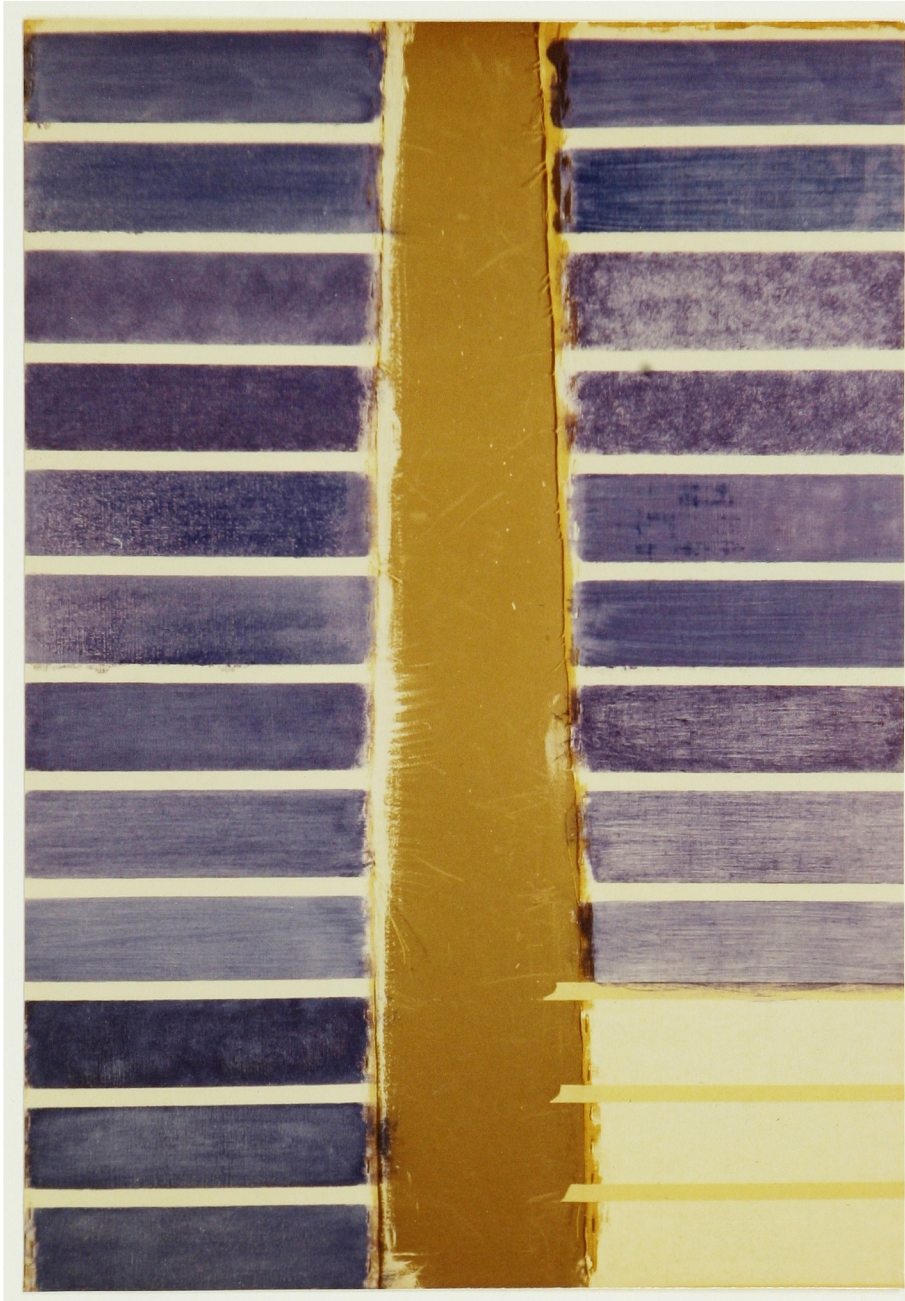


My method or technique consists of scumbling color upon color, and texture over texture, with the intent of creating a transparent matt or semi-matt, textural surface. This method slowly evolved over a period of years to the present state.

I experienced some dissatisfaction with the results earlier in the year, in the form of an uncontrolled irregularity of surface. My attempts to overcome this problem were threefold.

First I started using a double warp and weave linen support in the place of my usual cotton canvas. This solved most of my problem. In addition, I changed my sizing method from three thick coats of "Liquitex" gesso to five thin (one to one ratio, water to gesso) coats. This produced a much finer overall surface, which has given me the results I had been seeking.

The last variables were my grounds and my media so I decided to construct test panels using the two accepted grounds for oil paint, lead white over glue size and acrylic polymer (Liquitex Gesso) on an unsized support. On these panels I painted test swatches using the same color mixed with a variety of media that are stable with my color medium, of oil paint. For comparisons sake, I also included some swatches of acrylic paint on the acrylic ground. I now have a visual reference from which to compare potential media effects one to another. Up to the present writing no conclusions have been drawn.



"I write poems for poets and satires or grotesques for wits. ...For people in general I write prose and am content that they should be unaware that I do anything else.' This opinion, expressed by Robert Graves in a forward to *Poems 1938-1945*, is one which most poets will be found to share; and even if they have not dared to express themselves so frankly, their activities suit Mr. Graves's words. Their work has no appeal to people in general, and never should have had such appeal.

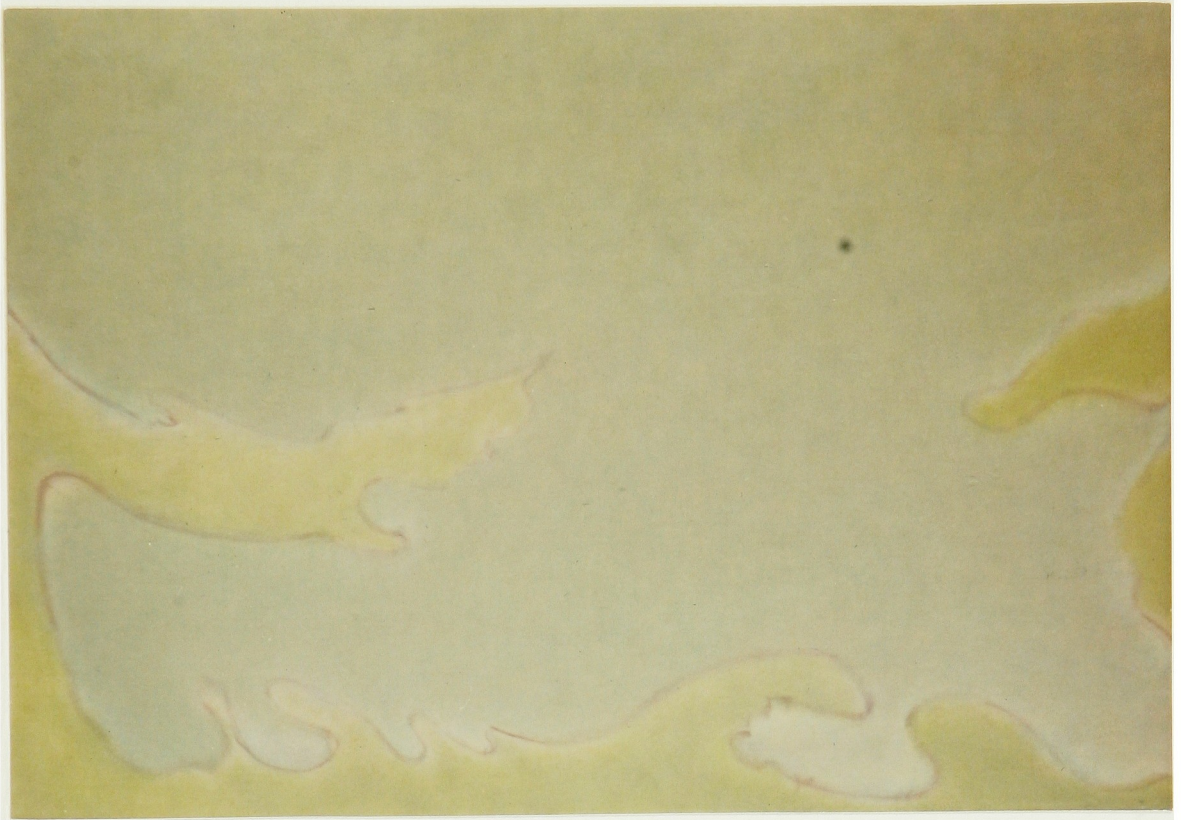
Let me now suggest another way of looking at the whole problem. Let me return to my starting point, and paraphrase Robert Graves's statement. Pictures should be painted for painters. For people in general artists should design useful things and be content if the public is unaware that they do anything else."¹¹

¹¹The Philosophy of Modern Art, Herbert Read, Cleveland, Meridian, 1961, p. 53.



"I, for instance, have always clung to the conviction that the imagination, as Baudelaire said, is the queen of the faculties. It is by its very nature expansive, unpredictable and not accessible to such neat schema as input-processing-output analysis. It seems to me that the imagination never allows a perception to remain in its raw direct state, if indeed there is such a thing. It is plastic, infinitely mobile, and its tendency is to allegorize."¹²

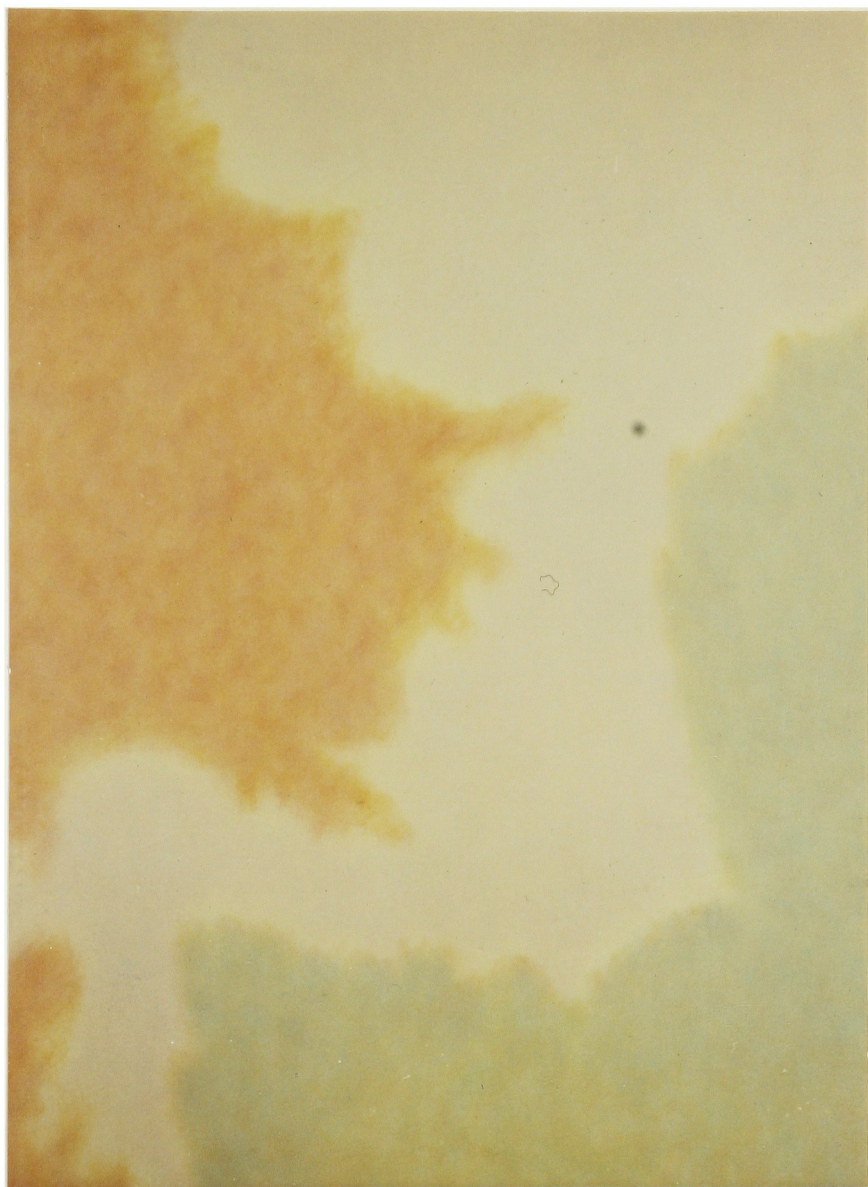
¹²In Praise of Illusion, Dore Ashton, The New Art, Gregory Battcock, New York, Dutton Paperbacks, 1966, p. 113.



"And what, finally we may ask, was the relation of art to life, of the artist to his public?

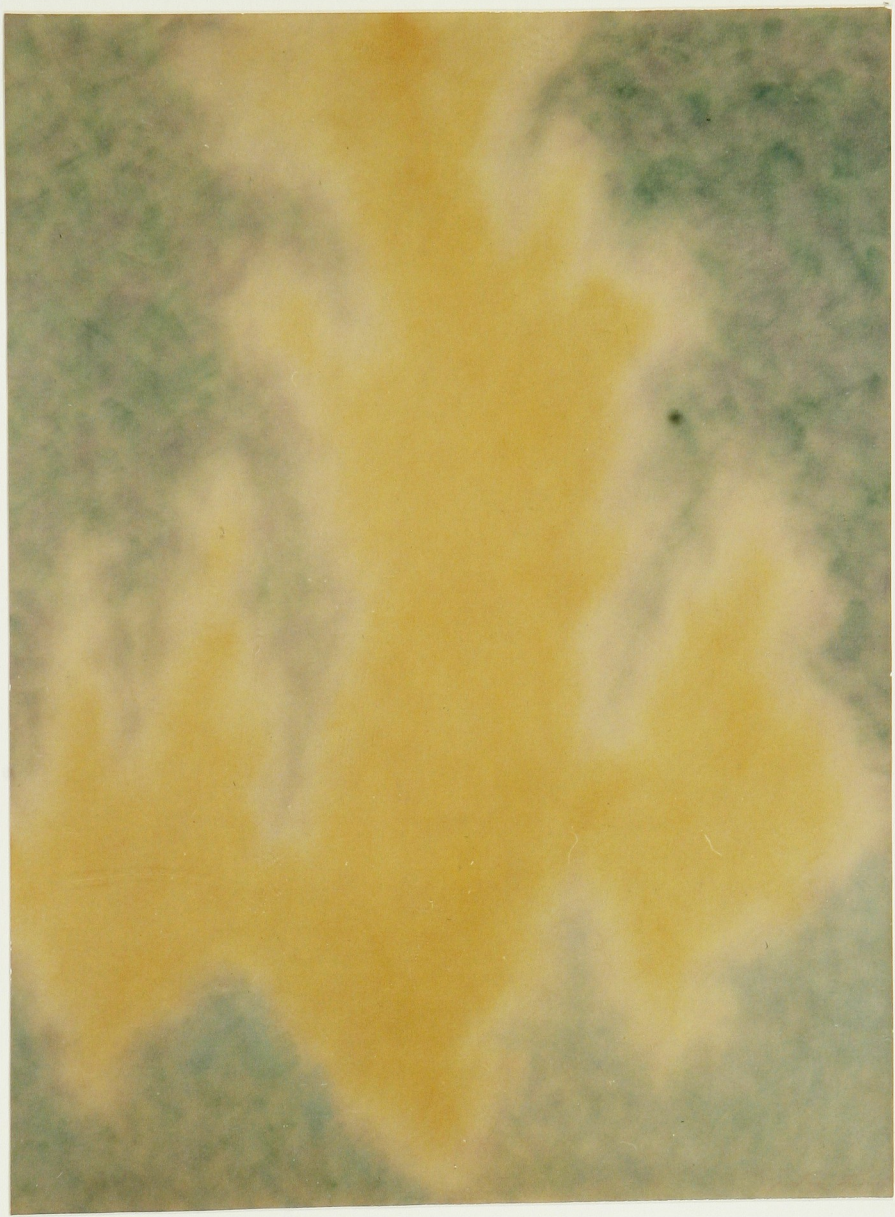
Whether the doctrine of art for art's sake was ever explicitly promulgated in the Far East, I do not know; but if it was, I think the Chinese, with their innate sanity, would have said: Yes, for the artist an admirable doctrine, but for the public absurd. The painter whose predominant aim is moral instruction and edification almost always fails of the effect he desires. It is the man who is absorbed in his work and in the perfection he seeks for it, who attracts us, just because he does not try to impress, just because he seems unconscious of spectators, and so by the power of beauty uplifts our hearts and enlarges our experience. But, for the public, art is not an end in itself; it is a spiritual experience which is to enrich its life."¹³

¹³The Flight of the Dragon, Lawrence Binyan,
London. Murray, 1914. p. 110.



"Of all the means at the painter's disposal color is the most immaterial, the most subject to change through counteraction, and the most mysterious. More than any other means, therefore, its cumulative effect is dependent on relations."¹⁴

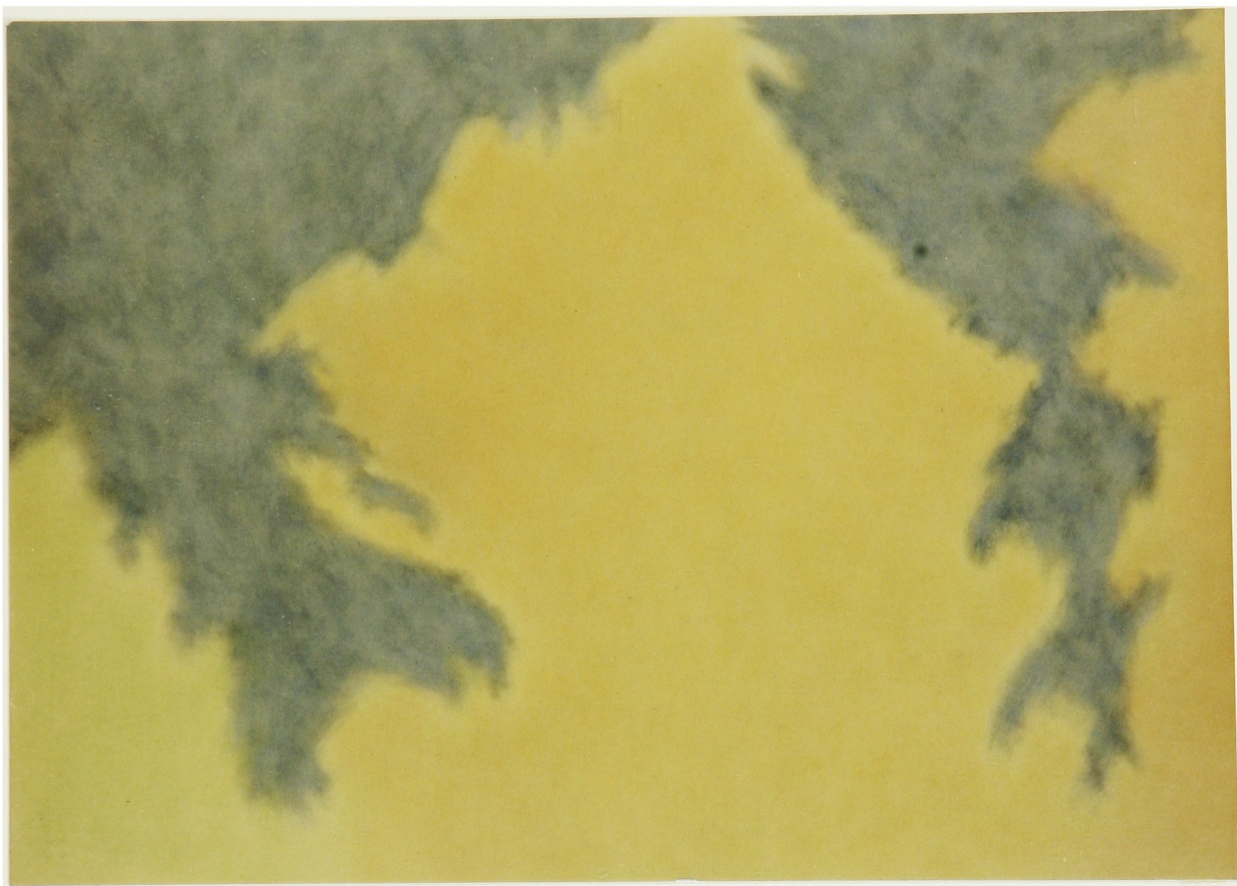
¹⁴Hans Hoffman, William C. Seitz, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1963, p. 53.



"But the purpose of a painter must not be conceived as separate from his pictorial means, and these pictorial means must be the more complete (I do not mean complicated) the deeper is his thought. I am unable to distinguish between the feeling I have for life and my way of expressing it.

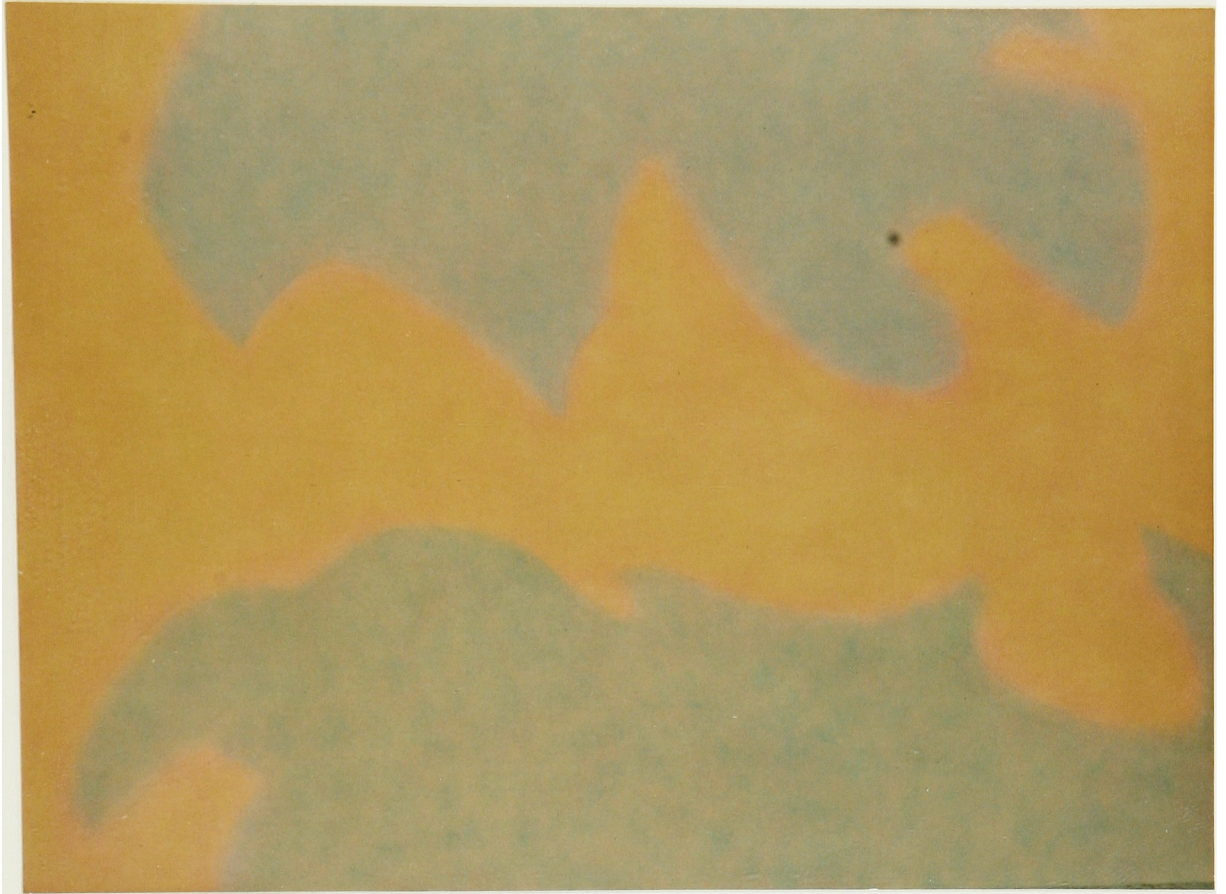
Expression to my way of thinking does not consist of the passion mirrored upon a human face or betrayed by a violent gesture. The whole arrangement of my picture is expressive. The place occupied by figures or objects, the empty spaces around them, the proportions, everything plays a part."¹⁵

¹⁵Notes of a Painter, Henry Matisse, 1908, Matisse His Art and His Public, Alfred H. Barr Jr., New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1951, p. 119.



"I cannot copy nature in a servile way; I must interpret nature and submit it to the spirit of the picture. When I have found the relationship of all the tones the result must be a living harmony of tones, a harmony not unlike that of a musical composition."¹⁶

¹⁶Ibid, p. 121.



"When does the creative process come to a conclusion?
'A work of art is finished from the point of view of the
artist when feeling and perception have resulted in a
spiritual synthesis; a work is finished when all parts
involved communicate themselves, so that they don't need
me.' And when a painting is wholly successful it achieves
"quality...the fruit of a sensitive and creative mind."
Only a plastic artist can produce quality, a spiritual
reality created by physical means."¹⁷

¹⁷Hans Hoffman, op.cit., p. 53.

"The artist and the public drift apart, until at last the public turns its back, or regards the artist as a juggler whose skill and dexterity alone are worthy of applause. It is important for the artist to gauge his position correctly, to realize that he has a duty to his art and to himself, that he is not a king but a servant of a noble end. He must search his soul deeply, develop it and guard it, so that his art may have something on which to rest and does not remain without bones.

The artist must have something to communicate, since mastery over form is not the end but, instead, the adapting of form to internal significance.

The artist's life is not one of pleasure. He must not live irresponsibly; he has a difficult work to perform, one which often proves a crown of thorns. He must realize that his acts, feelings and thoughts are the imponderable but sound material from which his work is to rise; he is free in art, but not in life.

Compared with non-artists the artist has a triple responsibility: (1) he must return the talent which he has; (2) his actions, feelings and thoughts, like those of every man, create a spiritual atmosphere which is either pure or infected; (3) his actions and thoughts are the material for his creations, which in turn influence the spiritual atmosphere.

The artist is a king, as Peladan says, not only because of his great powers, but also because he has great obligations.

If the artist be guardian of beauty, beauty can be measured only by the yardstick of internal greatness and necessity.

That is beautiful which is produced by internal necessity, which springs from the soul."¹⁸

The exhilarating, cohartic satisfaction of having dared and succeeded is the painters reward.

¹⁸Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Wassily Kandinsky, New York, Wittenborn, 1963, p. 75.

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